

AN ASPECT OF THE FACTS, WHICH PRESENTS A
HARMONY OF THE NARRATIVES OF THE SYNOP-
TISTS, WHO RELATE OUR LORD'S MIRACLE OF GIV-
ING SIGHT TO THE BLIND, ON THE OCCASION OF
HIS PASSING THROUGH JERICHO.

Matt. xx. 29-34; Mark x. 46-52; Luke xviii. 35-43.

THE explanation that I offer of the apparent discrepancy in this case, makes it necessary for me to establish, relatively to Luke xviii. 39, 40, that there was, in fact, between the occurrences related in the former, and those stated in the latter of those two verses, an interval unnoticed by that Evangelist.

I purpose to show that the blind man who sat by the wayside when "Jesus came nigh unto Jericho," may, simultaneously with Bartimeus, have been a recipient of the Divine gift of sight, at "the going out from Jericho," and that to the two, at first separated, but afterwards brought together—one of them being noticed by St. Luke, the other by St. Mark—St. Matthew refers.

I thus read the narratives, regarded as a whole: Jesus, on His journey to Jerusalem, passed through Jericho, followed by a multitude. As He came nigh to the latter place, a blind man—the subject of St. Luke's narrative—sat by the wayside, begging. He, made aware of the approach of Christ, rose up, and advancing with the crowd, stimulated and invigorated by his great faith, inferable from the language of his supplication, reached at last, and until then apparently unnoticed by Him, who was the object of his pursuit, a spot at, or near to the place of "going out from Jericho," seating himself by the

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wayside there. There, at that time was sitting blind Bartimeus. There, St. Matthew saw them both. There they repeated earnestly the same supplication. There, our Lord "stood still," "summoned them," and gave them sight. The place where they thus were is the only locality referred to in the narratives where it *necessarily* appears that Jesus healed blind eyes, on the particular day. It is fixed by St. Mark, St. Matthew being in accordance with, and St. Luke not being, as I hope to show, at variance with him, *at the place of "going out from Jericho."* What follows will, I think, support my hypothesis as to the state of the facts, and meet every reasonable objection to it. St. Mark mentions a little circumstance of significance as to the place of healing, when he tells us that Bartimeus, after he was healed, "followed Jesus *in the way.*" From the narratives we gather, with certainty, the following facts:—

As our Lord was passing through Jericho, Zaccheus was in the way, "pressed by the crowd." Our Lord never left the way from His first entrance, by it, within Jericho, until after He had healed Bartimeus, nor until after He had seen Zaccheus. There is no intimation of any miracle having been wrought after Zaccheus was first seen.

No reason exists for disturbing the order of events as stated by St. Luke, beginning with verse 35 of ch. xviii. and ending with verse 5 of the following chapter. That portion of his narrative, viewed, of course, according to his impression of facts, reads thus: "And it came to pass as He was come nigh to Jericho, a certain blind man s. b. t. w."—and so on to the end of the chapter, which tells only what occurred *before Jericho was entered.* The first six verses of the following chapter relate what took place *after Jesus had entered Jericho*, and that has reference to Zaccheus alone. No miracle is recorded to have been performed after Jesus had visited the house of Zaccheus. The first interview between our Lord and him must have taken place immediately after the healing of Bartimeus; and, shortly after that, Jesus must have gone to be the guest of Zaccheus.

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The original words of Matthew xx. 29, rendered "as they departed," and the original words of Mark x. 46, rendered "as he went out of" import this, and only this, relatively to our Lord and the crowd, that they were, at the times referred to, *in the act of "going out" of Jericho*, that is, by and on the highway by which they had entered within that place. A construction of the phrases that would make them import an absolute and final departure from Jericho proper, in any other sense than that of leaving the place to go to the house of Zaccheus—*supposing that were shown to be outside of Jericho*—is not at all necessary. Some commentators have been misled by supposing—without any authority for the assumption in the reports—that the miraculous acts referred to by St. Matthew and St. Mark, have, or that either of them has, *reference to a point of time subsequent to Jesus' visit to the house of Zaccheus*.

In consistency with my view, our Lord, on witnessing the manifestation of Zaccheus' faith, may have, then changed a primary purpose of going on *at once* to Jerusalem, and that, in order to proceed to the residence of Zaccheus. To me it appears in the highest degree probable that such was the fact. I regard the words of the original of verse 1, chapter xix. as very significant to a right understanding of the effect of St. Luke's narrative. That Evangelist writes—"He, having entered into Jericho, was passing through it,"—i. e. traversing it by means of a highway that extended through it. Jesus, of whom this is predicated, was then passing through Jericho, purposing to go out of it, beyond it, to a fixed *destination*. We know that that destination was Jerusalem. With a view to that, He proceeds, by the highway, in a direction towards the Holy City, until He—being, then, in the very act of "going out of" Jericho, and still in the way—sees Zaccheus, and witnesses his faith.—He immediately announces to Zaccheus, His intention that day, to stay at his house. Thither He goes. What is the fair and natural inference? Do not the circumstances point to the conclusion that I have intimated?

The following aspect of the three narratives is presented: In each there are three actors—our Lord, a blind man, a crowd. In each, following the course of the narrative up to and inclusive of the statement "And Jesus stood," which is common to them all, *the acts, the utterances, of every one of the actors, the rebuke of the crowd included, are identical with the acts, utterances and rebuke stated in each of the other narratives.* This makes it most improbable that each narrative records a distinct miracle, or that St. Matthew notices one exercise of Divine healing power, and St. Luke another. We may observe, also, a substantial harmony of the circumstances stated in all the narratives subsequently to those noticed above. The internal evidence afforded by this remarkable co-incidence points to a conclusion, that only one occasion of giving sight to blind eyes is within the scope of all the narratives. The effect of this evidence will be striking, if the reports be placed before the mind's eye thus:—

Matt. xx, v. 31.—"Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David."
v. 32.—"And Jesus stood still, and called them."

Mark x, v. 48.—"Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."
v. 49.—"And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called."

Luke xviii, v. 39.—"Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."
v. 40.—"And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him."

In view of this, ask, Did Jesus, that day, hear the particular words of supplication from a blind man sitting by the way, as "He was come nigh to Jericho," and immediately stand and summon the suppliant to his presence; and did He *again*, that day, hear the same supplication addressed to Him by Bartimeus, sitting by the way "as He went out of Jericho," and *again* immediately stand and summon Bartimeus; and did He *again* that day, hear the same supplication addressed to Him by two blind men, sitting by the way, "as He departed from Jericho," and *again* immediately stand, and summon the two suppliants? The mind must be differently constituted from mine that can give an affirmative answer to that question!

Observe in connection with this coincidence, that, while it is highly improbable that two blind men, acting in distant places, should have addressed our Lord in precisely the same, and those, remarkable, terms of supplication, the circumstance is not improbable, when both are sitting side by side, and moved by the same impulse. It would be indeed quite natural, that the blind man seated "at the place of going out," heard this cry uttered by him who had, at first, sat "at the approach to Jericho," and echoed it, when both were brought together.

In this case, St. Matthew's report must be used as a key to a discovery of the facts, because he was an eye witness to all that occurred—see Matt. xx. 17-18,—and because neither St. Luke nor St. Mark appears to have been such; especially so, if we consider that St. Mark is in harmony with St. Matthew, as to the place, and in every other respect, assuming that St. Mark knew of Bartimeus *alone* being healed. St. Matthew proceeds *at once* to relate the event which occurred *at the departure from Jericho*. He, present with his Lord throughout the whole day's journey, mentions one only miraculous act, as done on the day in question. That surely, is a striking fact!

I now turn to St. Luke, proposing to accommodate his report to that of St. Matthew, but without violating any rule of construction in doing so. If St. Luke's narrative must be read as relating events in unbroken continuity, as it would, of course, have to be *if it stood alone*, there is a discrepancy as to the place where the blind man referred to by him is represented by him to have been when Jesus opened his eyes, for St. Matthew, *present at that place*, saw not that act of healing there performed. But, if there was in fact, though it is not told by St. Luke, an interval between the second cry of that man and the "standing of Jesus,"—an interval that would be represented by the time occupied by our Lord in passing from the place of entrance into Jericho, by the way, to the place where Bartimeus received his sight, or to that where Zaccheus first appeared—then harmony pervades the three narratives. Surely this is

suggestive! St. Mark's report does not mar that harmony. He was not, so far as we know, an eye-witness of the occurrences. It would be difficult to regard him as such, for he refers to the healing of Bartimeus as a miracle distinct from that which is recorded by St. Matthew. We know however, that none such was performed, inasmuch as it is unnoticed by St. Matthew. And, yet, there is no inconsistency between St. Matthew and St. Mark. The latter was not as we may assume, informed that Bartimeus was one of the two that St. Matthew saw healed at the place mentioned in both their narratives. It cannot be urged that St. Matthew did not report the healing of Bartimeus, because he knew that St. Luke had related it. The precedent existence of St. Matthew's narrative rests on the unanimous authority of the ancient Fathers.

Let us inquire, then, what objections can be reasonably urged against so reading St. Luke, as if his report expressed the assumed interval. It may be objected—and *no other objection occurs to my mind*—that St. Luke *appears* to have intended the several circumstances stated by him to be understood as having occurred without interruption of continuity.

This is my rationale of interpretation of his report: He, from some unknown source—but *not as an eye-witness*—learned everything that he has reported; but, I suppose, *that he had not been informed of the only fact assumed by me, viz., that Jesus, aware of the presence of the blind man, when he sat at the entrance to Jericho, suffered him to keep pursuing, for a portion of the way, and then summoned him to His presence.*

Obviously, this alternative presents itself: either thus to modify St. Luke's narrative, or to hold that St. Matthew did not mention the healing "at the entrance to Jericho," because he did not know of the fact, or because he had forgotten it, or because he did not deem it worthy of notice. He could not but have been aware of it, if it was a fact. The truth is, *that his silence on the point can only be explained, by supposing the fact to have been, as I am thoroughly satisfied it*

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was, that one of the "two" whose eyes he saw opened by our Lord, at "the going out," was the very man whom St. Luke speaks of as sitting by the wayside at the approach to Jericho.

Before concluding this paper, I invite attention to certain passages in St. Luke's Gospel that show his manner of reporting events relatively to the times when they occurred. Compare Luke xviii, 39-40—the case before us—with Luke iii, 18-20; Luke xxiv, 49-51, and Luke xix, 44-45; observing, that in each of the three first mentioned places the two consecutive verses are connected by the same Greek conjunction. As to the first of these instances, St. Luke iii. 18-20: St. Luke *appears* to have related the imprisonment of the Baptist to have taken place immediately after the close of the sermon of the latter, whereas evidence aliunde shows that an interval of some days elapsed between the two circumstances. If there were no explanatory extrinsic evidence, then the effect of what St. Luke relates in chapter xxiv, 49-51, would be, that the Ascension of our Lord took place on the very day of His Resurrection. Turning to St. Luke xix, 44-45, and reading the verses alone, it *appears* that our Lord purged the Temple immediately upon his triumphal entry into Jerusalem; whereas, to make those verses accord with Mark xi. 11-15, we must understand that there was an interval of a night spent at Bethany between the two events. As to extrinsic evidence in like manner affecting the subject of our inquiry, we have it in the combined circumstances of St. Matthew's presence at the entrance to, and at the going out from, Jericho, and in his silence as to any miracle having been performed at the former place: So that the cases referred to are parallel with that before us.

For my own part, if there were in those three narratives an incurable discrepancy as regards the circumstances detailed, the existence of such would not in the least impair my faith in the Divine inspiration of any one of the documents; although I should, in that case, deem it unwise to force the discordant elements into an unnatural and only seeming accordance. But, after a careful consideration of the subject before

me, I have at least convinced myself, that my hypothesis presents an interpretation of these reports, that is, alike, harmonious and true.

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